Depot Town Rag

Volume 24, Number 10

December 2008

The creative community thrives here

100% FREE *RAG* CONTENT

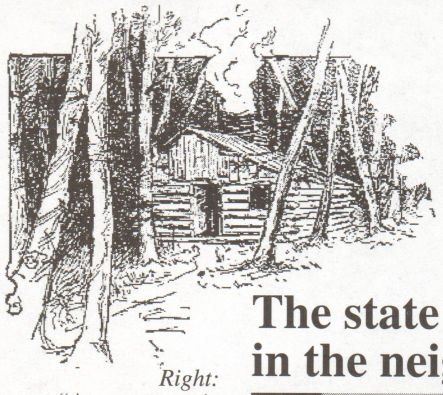
A PUBLICATION OF THE DEPOT TOWN ASSOCIATION, INC. The Old Caboose, 400 Market Place, Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198

District 'lofts' overflowing with non-conforming and artsy Bohemian types

"Loft" may be a new term to Depot Towners who, until the historic preservation movement, just called those spaces "upstairs." This block's second, third, and fourth floor spaces have been in constant use for more than a century. Artists think they discovered them when all they really discovered was cheap rent. Low rent, combined with high ceilings, good light, and a short walk to a neighborhood bar have made a perfect place for creative types.

The Arts Alliance surveyed practicing artists in Washtenaw County and proved what we have known all along: this block is a haven for folks who live and behave creatively. We knew that.

This is neither New York's Greenwich Village, the Left Bank of Paris, nor the art-filled alleys of Santa Fe, but some say it's a lot closer than the streets of A^2 during the annual summer panic of ever-sprawling art fairs.



This drawing of Godfroy's Trading Post was not made on site, and it's anybody's guess what it looked like, but later painters, photographers, and printmakers started making records of their times in studios in Depot Town throughout history

Right: "Arrangement in Grey and Black: The Artist's Mother," James McNeill Whistler, 1871. Oil on canvas, Musée d'Orsay, Paris. Museum collections indicate Picasso never painted his mom.

The state of the arts in the neighborhood

Depot Town's moms waited patiently for artistic recognition, but none of their tots' renderings ever made it into Big Time Art

Before Classmates.com and FaceBook, Ypsilanti's Camp Photo Company took most of America's school pictures

Photo Street–from River St. to the River–commemorates famed school photographer

Even if you didn't live in Ypsi, Camp Photo probably took your picure in school. Camp Photo's world headquarters in the upper floors over Frenchie's/Sidetrack processed school photos from all over the U.S. For an extra fee, the photographers would touch up complexions

From the Lowpoint Illinois High School, 1928 Quill yearbook. Senior Elizabeth Fannie Mundell

Batavia, OH, School

Keokuk Iowa team

Jamestown NY team before the flood that destroyed all the class pictures hanging above the school's lockers

Cunningham Bros

Yearbook Photos: Portraits, Composites, Classes & Clubs

The arts proliferate and prosper here

The studios of Nelson Amos, Elizabeth Potts, and at least a dozen more practicing artists follow an old tradition in this block. Artists have been making, showing, and selling their product in Depot Town for longer than today's locals can remember.

Artrain USA has made more stops in Ypsilanti than any other town in America. In fact, Ypsi's Depot Town was Artrain's *first* stop. Promoters did not have to look far to find artists to exhibit and demonstrate.

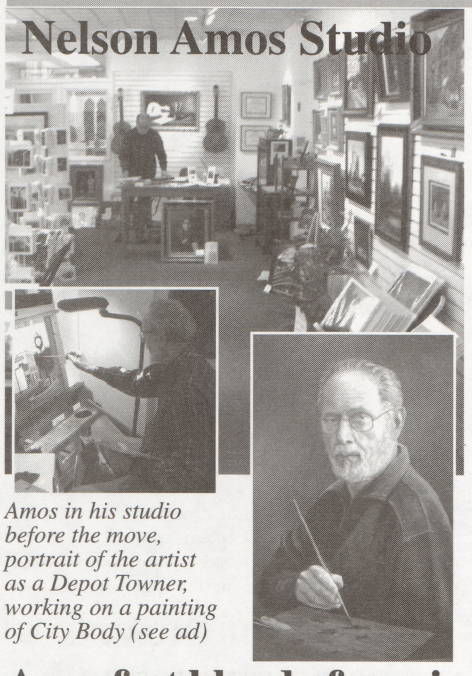
The "Artrain Building" became the home and studio of Depot Town Association's second president, Beverly Shankwiler, who welded her sculpture at 52 E. Cross, where Bird Brain is today.

John Pappas' world class sculpture studio stands guard at the west end of the Cross Street Bridge in Ypsilanti's first city hall and jail.

Painters, potters, photographers, printmakers, and even practitioners who don't start with "P" have always found a homebase in Ypsilanti's creative Depot Town.

Art is like an ill-trained Labrador retriever that drags you out into traffic. *-Annie Dillard*

Nelson Amos Studio



Amos in his studio before the move, portrait of the artist as a Depot Towner, working on a painting of City Body (see ad)

A perfect blend of music with visual arts at #23

Nelson Amos was an art major at Morehead State University in Kentucky where he learned drawing and painting from Naomi Claypool, for whom the art school is named today. He forsook that training and followed his interest in music which eventually led him to a position at the EMU department of music and dance. He remains there after 34 years as Professor of Music. Several years ago, Amos's wife Korin gave him a box of pencils which took him back to his earlier interest. He's been playing guitar and painting ever since.

In establishing his studio in Depot Town, Amos has merged his interest in early music with traditional portrait painting. The Baroque artists, Velasquez and Rembrandt have heavily influenced Amos's work: "I like the older ways of painting," Amos notes, "with light coming from the traditional process of underpainting."

Look for his glowing portraits—and scenes of his favorite neighborhood—as he moves his Studio/gallery/frame shop to its new location at 23 E. Cross.

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Art, Meaning, and Perception *[A non-credit monolog]*

Perception is everything. Tell the same lie often enough (or show the same painting, print, or photo enough times) and the perception is reinforced; it becomes art.

Our collective memory sees Depot Town as a romantic, exciting, and practical place connected to a warm and distant past, whether it's authentic or not.

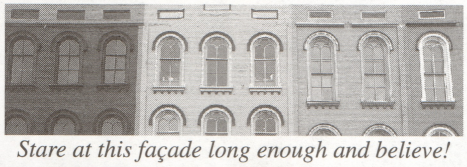
The builders never called nineteenth century commercial buildings artistic; they were merely functional. Over years they continued to serve their purpose with businesses on the ground floor and residences above, but some of the sparse decorative (artistic?) appurtenances either fell off or were removed for the sake of safety.

With the advance of the historic preservation movement, neighborhoods like ours were later labeled "Victorian" and, as with all art forms, the medium enjoys sustainability when it has a repeatable name.

One of Depot Town's crude cement block façades was painted over in 1982 with suggestions of cast iron columns, brackets, and an elaborate cornice—all fake and two-dimensional—to the point where Arborlanders mistook it for the real thing as they stopped for the trains. "Isn't this quaint?" they enthused, and put us on their list of things to show to other out-of-towners.

Exhibitions of old vehicles—trucks, fire engines, and candy-colored gas hog behemoths—line the streets every summer. Some enjoy their nomination to an "art form" and fans flock to the district to salivate over them. Photogs make art of buildings reflected in chrome hub caps.

Photos of our town clock with a brick façade in the background have been appearing on countless Web sites and newsletters. We're here to stay, now that we're art.



Stare at this façade long enough and believe!

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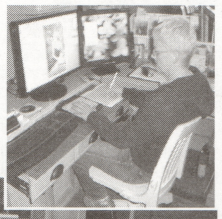
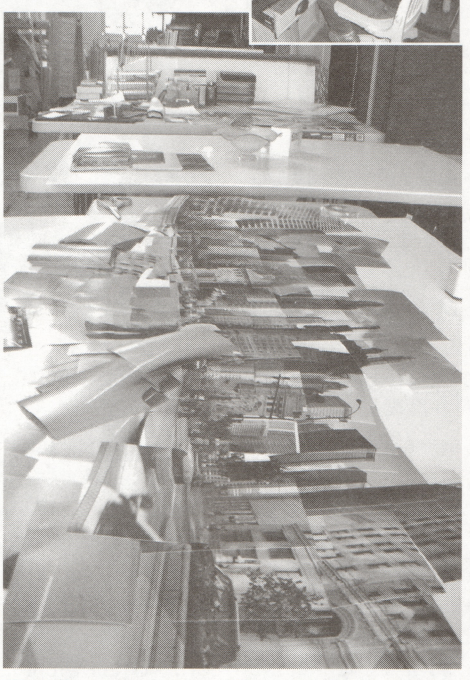
Potts Studio



Photographer Mary Potts at the computer console in her studio



Wedding portraits will never be the same after the non-traditional treatment they receive in the studio of Mary Potts and her husband Tim Pulice.

Photographed portraits and urban landscapes come together in a collage on huge work tables in Potts' spacious studio at 27 E. Cross where passers-by can watch the entire process from the studio's avant garde street window or from comfortable sofas and chairs just inside the front door.

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When art finds no temple open, it takes refuge in the workshop *-Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach*

Brooks Stevens, fiber artist

Brooks Stevens prints a silk screen design as she prepares portions of an installation for an upcoming exhibition, Women's Wear/ Women's Ware at EMU.

Fiber artist Brooks Harris Stevens moved into her third floor studio more than a year ago when she took a position as an Assistant Professor teaching Textiles in the Art Department at EMU. Stevens started sewing when she was four in Raleigh, NC, and has not stopped. Today, she and husband Jim live in College Heights and she works on campus and in Depot Town; he travels to Lawrence Tech where he is an Assistant Professor in architecture. The artist exhibits her works nationally as well as locally.

Former DTA president throws paint around

Master painter Carolyn McKeever shared her talents teaching at EMU, Henry Ford Community College, and WCC before retiring to operate a design agency, AdArt, with daughter Diane Brown, in Brooklyn, MI. She and husband Gary eventually rehabbed the apartment below her studio and it's been a full-time job ever since.

Many Ypsilanti Heritage Festival posters have been from McKeever's studio and a few are featured below:

1994 embellished an antique quilt theme

1987 used Camp Photo's car to celebrate the state's 150th

1988 reveled in our skyline of towers

1989 stood the water tower as in Pisa

1997 recalled retro tourist postcards

Artrain USA at Detroit's Renaissance Center was almost as exciting as Artrain USA in Ypsilanti's historic Depot Town

Artrain USA stopped here first

Traveling to communities across the United States, Artrain USA is "America's Hometown Art Museum." Artrain's first stop, ever, was in Ypsilanti's historic Depot Town in 1975. Many attribute the local preservation movement to Artrain's arrival.

A nonprofit organization, Artrain USA's mission is to enrich lives and build communities through the arts. An art museum housed in vintage rail cars that travels via the nation's railroads, Artrain USA brings world class art exhibitions and art education programs to communities and their residents and delivers exceptional opportunities for learning, growth and art appreciation while encouraging the development of local cultural programs and organizations.

Artrain USA received the 2006 National Service Award for Museums by the Institute of Museum and Library Service.

Artrain USA's current exhibit is *Native Views: Influences of Modern Culture*, of contemporary Native American art.

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Picture Galleries evolved over the years

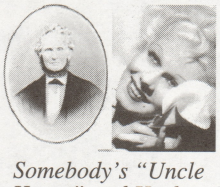
Left: Everybody notices Ma Bush looking out her bordello window at the Ypsilanti Cornet Band, but they often overlook the New York Gallery of fine art and cheap prints on the 2nd floor of 52 E. Cross

Picture galleries were popular in large and small towns in the nineteenth century, forerunners to art galleries. Rather than objects of art with a capital "A," picture galleries featured inexpensive lithographic prints, both color and black & white, suitable for framing and hanging in homes of the period. Much the same kind of material can now be found at Big Box housewares stores where picture frames and "wall art" are offered for sale.

"Blue Boy"

"Pop(ular) art" of the 19th century included portraits of Washington and Lincoln, soporific landscapes, religious scenes, Thomas Gainsborough's "Blue Boy," Thomas Lawrence's insipid "Pinkie," and Millet's "The Angelus." Dining room décor was enhanced by softly colored landscapes and still lifes of flowers, fruit, and dead animals. Even bathroom art was found at picture galleries: small prints of sea birds, flamingoes, and silhouettes of maidens in bubble baths were considered *avant garde*, if not actually racy examples of visual interpretation.

Contemporary decorators find wallpaper cornice borders of cityscapes similar to that seen in the buildings in Depot Town (and banner of this little newsletter) to bring an air of old-timey verisimilitude to even the most mundane tract home or McMansion.



Somebody's "Uncle Henry" and Harlow

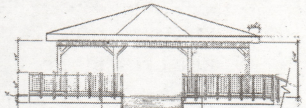
The **Old Town Bazaar** (at 50-Nifty E. Cross, mid-1960s) had a Rent-an-Ancestor department where garage sale family portrait cast-offs were snatched up by families whose own progenitors were either camera-shy or malformed. Another Bazaar department included giant black & white posters of movie stars from an earlier period: Jean Harlow, Humphrey Bogart, and Boris Karloff covered the walls of EMU students' dorm rooms and apartments.

In the 1980s, Paul Fetters' **River Art Works** (same address) offered several bins of bargain art print reproductions along with the works of talented local artists. RAW's chief undertaking was top quality framing service.

A **Depot Town Art Gallery** flourished at 19 East Cross for more than a year in the late 1980s, with local artists co-operating in the promotion of its shows, events, and hours.

Riverside Park dock/gazebo project under way

WCC's Construction Technology Hard Hats wait as officials get the project dedicated



Eight-sided structure will rise atop a new dock

3 November 2008: Washtenaw Community College School of Construction Technology; City, EMU, and Depot Town Community Development Corporation officials dedicated the razing of the Riverside Park dock for construction of an octagonal gazebo that will take its place.

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In the next *Rag*:

The Great Fire of 1973: the former Deist Grocery burns to the ground. We almost lost Depot Town! See the Market Alley....

Depot Town Rag

"All the news that fits, we print"
A monthly publication of
the Depot Town Association, Inc.
400 Market Place, The Old Caboose
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198
To the editor:
thomasdodd@comcast.net

The Depot Town Association, Inc.

Gary McKeever, President
Merrill Guerra, Vice President
Ruth Ann Jamnick, Treasurer
Sandee French, Scy. & Past President
Website: www.depottown.org
DTA does not meet in December.
Regular meetings at 6:30 p.m., 3rd Wednesday of each month at Café Luwak.

www.depottown.org

We're on our own now

Our staff: Rag editor and paper boy carry on in Ypsilanti's Depot Town. Missing from picture: proofreader.

The Ann Arbor News has left town, following the exodus of the *Ypsilanti Courier* whose office is now in Belleville. *The News* announced it was closing its Ypsi office as of November 26, 2008, and Ypsilanti customers who wish to do business in person to place classifieds or pay bills can come to their print plant in Pittsfield Township.

No more dailies or weeklies are being created in Ypsilanti. Only this miserable little monthly *Rag* is left to tell the news.

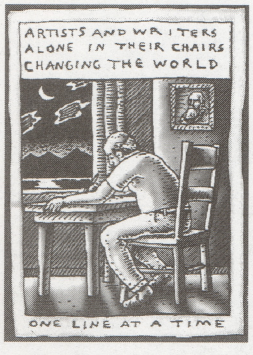
The Depot Town Rag now has the distinction of being Ypsilanti's only hard copy newspaper, and it's still printed at Standard Printing, right here alongside the railroad tracks.

They made history...in one block

"Artists' works" of the 1970s melded with district's work ethic

In the mid-Nineteen Seventies, loft living became the rage in popular media as newspapers and magazines of the day ran features about "urban pioneer" artist-types who gave up suburbia for depressed downtown mid-western commercial neighborhoods.

Painters and potters, sculptors and printmakers abandoned their cheesy basement studios in the 'burbs as they moved their families into the upper reaches of the old commercial buildings down by the depot in Ypsi.



Art sometimes took a back seat to the more practical matters of making the old buildings viable and, once the City's Historic District Ordinance was in place, community dynamics and politics took much of the rest of their time. The Depot Town Association, Heritage Festival, and countless neighborhood activities like jazz, cooking contests, the Farmers' Market, KidsArt, and other promotions soon gave way to forming a Downtown Development Authority, the Tax Increment Financing Authority (TIFA), and eventually the formation of a Community Development Corporation.

As Gerry French, the founding president of the Depot Town Association, points out, the action was mostly political and social in those days, and "art with a capital A" often became secondary to community organization and development.

The artsy types kept throwing paint and clay around, but the block never took on the cachet of an artists' colony. The neighborhood folks who gathered at the bar or on the sidewalks in their lawn chairs in the evenings all had hands that showed the effect of hard work; busted knuckles and tired arms were the same for painters and sculptors as they were for car restorers, plumbers, electricians, and carpenters. The work ethic remains the same for the workers on our block and "Work" still seems to take precendence over "Art."

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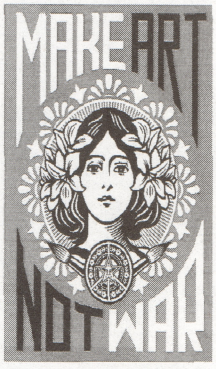
What is *ART* anyway?

-Georgia O'Keeffe

All art is propaganda; on the other hand, not all propaganda is art.

-George Orwell



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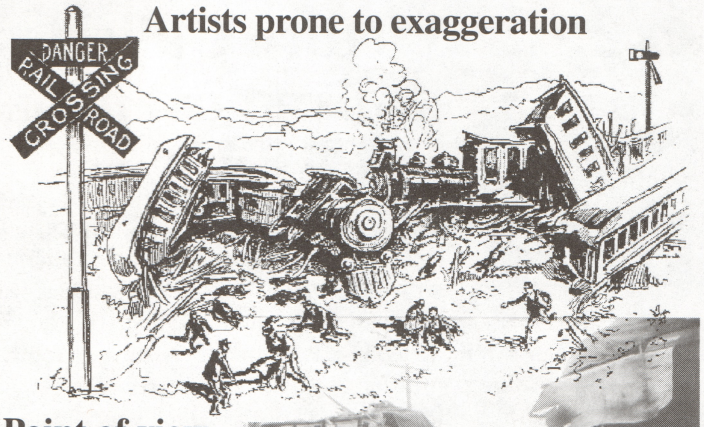
Artists prone to exaggeration



Point of view is everything

At right is a photo of the April 28, 1908 collision of the Ypsi-Ann interurban cars between Ypsilanti and Ann Arbor, but the artistic version at the top is a lot more fun.

How important are the visual arts in our society? I feel strongly that the visual arts are of vast and incalculable importance. Of course I could be prejudiced. *I am* a visual art. *-Kermit the Frog (Muppet)*

Artists' Census counts creative class

-From the 2008 ArtistsReport.doc

2530 people responded to last year's Artists' Census conducted by the Arts Alliance in Washtenaw County. 157 of those artists live in the Ypsilanti ZIP code areas. If gallery, studio, and bar conversations are any indication, many of those artists have been hanging out in Depot Town for quite a while. The Arts Alliance in-depth look at artists shows great activity in the creative arts in our community. Apparently you just can't stop people from making art.

The largest group of respondents claimed "visual arts" as their creative field (616) followed by music (434), crafts (433), literature (319, theater (255), design arts (272), photography (198), and dance (76). Still other respondents work in the fields of media arts, folk arts, opera, musicals, and the humanities. Grouped differently, musicians would surely hold the lead as the largest group.

22% of those who call themselves artists report they are pursuing a degree or certification while 77.4% are not. Most of the artists see art as their life's work.

Local artists reported spending a great deal of time each week making their art works:

	Number	%
160 hours or more	343	29.2
80-159 hours	360	30.7
40-79 hours	470	40.0

33.2% have a "day job" not related to their creative field, 31.8% hold jobs related to their art. 19.6% support themselves by their art, and 31.0% enjoy financial support for their art.

1,173 of our local artists share their creative activity with the public through exhibits, shows, and special events. Respondents to the survey all called themselves an artist (visual, performing, literary) by their own definition.

Dear Jubilee Friends,

On behalf of the New Year Jubilee of Southeastern Michigan Committee, we wish to thank you for your outstanding commitment and support of the alcohol free, family friendly event that we have all been proud to be involved with over the past fifteen years.

It is with regret that we must inform you of the decision to discontinue the New Year Jubilee event.

Over the past several years we have seen funding levels reduced each year and have determined our inability to maintain the level of entertainment excellence our attendees have enjoyed cannot continue based on ticket sales income exclusively.

We hope you have wonderful memories of time spent on New Year's Eve as a site coordinator, volunteer or performer.

We have enjoyed working with all of you and wish you the very best.

- New Year Jubilee committee

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to all of you . . .

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Thank you for all your business in 2008
And we'll see you in Spring of 2009!

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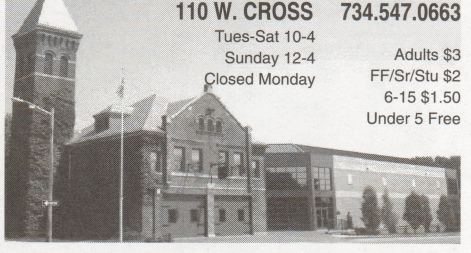

RAGTIME Coming events

Enjoy this month's

TOY & TRAIN DISPLAYS in neighborhood shop windows

and continue the experience into the winter at the

Washtenaw County Historical Society

Toys & Train Exhibit

500 N. Main St., Ann Arbor

Museum on Main Street

January/February

Wed, Sat, & Sun, noon-4 p.m.

A Holiday Concert Tradition

Ypsilanti Community Choir
Ypsilanti Community Band

Thursday, December 11 • 7:30 p.m.
Pease Auditorium, EMU
admission & parking free

www.ypsicommchoir.org • www.ypsicommband.org

"Like Snowflakes, each store in Ypsi is unique," says the newest Shop Ypsi brochure for the holidays.

15 of these uniquenesses are right here in Depot Town.

"Learn more. Share gift ideas," they suggest.

See the elegant flier in our shops, or visit ypsi.buylocalmichigan.com, or just hang around in Depot Town. All three methods are effective.

Ypsilanti Historical Society
Museum and Archives
(free admission)

Hours: 2:00 to 5:00pm
Tuesday thru Sunday

220 North Huron Street
Ypsilanti, MI 48197

www.ypsilantihistoricalsociety.org

Museum: 734-482-4990 *Archives: 734-217-8236*

It's beginning to look at lot like...Ypsi!

At left: DDA funds contracted with Ron Rupert to rehab the Crossing Guard Tower this fall with a darker green contrasting color and new batten boards to accent its verticality.

At right: Dennis Caplinger, of Eradico Services (Christmas Decor Division) strings lights in our trees to light up the neighborhood for the coming holidays.

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Unique holiday observance

Depot Towners celebrate the coming holiday season in an unusual manner—in December. It's not because they are slow; they're just too busy. While the off-center shopping centers started their hype for the holidays somewhere around the Fourth of July, merchants in this little block of commercialism were just too busy with street events, festivals, and neighborhoodly hoopla to overlap their promotions.

Kimberly RICE
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